



Narrating the Silences of History: Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill*

Dr. Supriya M.

Associate Professor, Department of English, Fatima Mata National College, (Autonomous), Kollam, Kerala, India

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Abstract— Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* (2014) is based on recorded historical events of the journey of two French missionaries Nicholas-Michel Krick and Augustin-Etienne Bourry, who were engaged in a mission to set up a church in Tibet, but in the 1800s the only way to reach there was through northeast India—present day Arunachal Pradesh. While they were on the final leg of their journey, they were killed by Kaisha, a village chief of the Mishmi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh on August 2, 1854 at Somme village, near the Tibetan border. The Mishmee chief was later captured and sentenced to death by hanging in Dibrugar (Assam) jail. It is this historical event that goes into the making of Dai's novel. Mamang Dai dexterously interweaves Gimur- Kajinsha love story into this historical narrative. The arrival of Father Krick at the Village of Mebo as part of Southern Tibet Mission and later his journey to Mishmee hills coincides with Gimur's elopement with Kajinsha from her native village Mebo to Kajinsha's Mishmee hills. Dai imagines it was inevitable that their pathways must have crossed. While the priest and Kajinsha are characters from history, Gimur is a fictional character created by Dai to explore the gaps and silences of history. Where the story encoded in history ends, or gets enshrouded in enigmatic silence, Dai makes Gimur articulate those silences and proclaim the innocence of Kajinsha, thus subverting a historical narrative.

Keywords— fictional narrative, historical records, journey, Tibetan Mission, tribes

Celebrating the 60th Tibetan National Uprising Day commemoration, Father Felix Antony, the social communication secretary of Miao Diocese in east Arunachal Pradesh observed:

Tibet and Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh have an age-old connection. French missionaries Nicolas Kirk and Augustine Bourry were killed on their way to Tibet in 1854. They sowed the first seeds of Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh 165 years ago before they were killed on August 2 the same year at the Tibet-Arunachal border region by a Mishmi Tribe chieftain. ("Arunachal: French Missionaries Krick and Bourry")

The French missionaries, Nicholas-Michel Krick and Augustin-Etienne Bourry, were members of the Society of the Paris Foreign Missions, an institute of diocesan priests who spread out across the globe to promote

Christianity. Krick and Bourry wanted to reach Tibet, but in the 1800s the only way to reach there was through northeast India—present day Arunachal Pradesh. Both travelled from Chennai to Kolkata and to Arunachal Pradesh, becoming the first Christian missionaries to reach the region. Father Krick reached Sadiya, a river island in Assam on September 26, 1851. In 1852, he made the first visit to Tibet. Father Bourry was initially appointed to Korean mission, but later changed to the Tibetan Mission. He reached Guwahati, and met his superior Father Krick at Saikhowa on July 22, 1853. On February 19, 1854, Krick and Bourry left Saikhowa for Tibet. But while they were on the final leg of their journey, they were killed by a village chief of the Mishmi tribe by name Kaisha, on August 2, 1854 at Somme village in Lohit district, near the Tibetan border. It is said that 35-year-old Krick was sick and 28-year-old Bourry was praying when Kaisha killed them using his machete. The Mishmee chief was later captured and

sentenced to death by hanging in Dibrugar (Assam) jail. "Their bodies were buried by local residents and it is believed a spring started flowing from near the site. Some say chief Kaisha killed them because the missionaries resembled the British rulers. But that account doesn't appear to be true," said Father Felix Anthony (qtd. in Parashar). Their mortal remains are still enshrined and preserved by the people of Somme Village. There is almost no documentary detail about the two in Arunachal Pradesh. But a lot about them is known from the letters they sent back to Paris. They mention of their arduous journey and how their guide robbed them. Steps are currently underway in Arunachal Pradesh to canonize the two priests. Catherine Boo, a prominent Catholic from Tezu, a Mishmi tribe town said: "We are very happy to see the progress with the process of canonization. We pray that this day will remove the blot of stains we have acquired because of the killing by own tribe's man 165 years ago" (qtd. in Gomes).

It is this historical event that goes into the making of Padmashree awardee Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* (2014), which won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for writing in English in 2017, the first from the North East to get the award for an English novel. Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh is a distinct figure among the literary voices of North East Indian literature. The culture and history of Arunachal Pradesh and its varied ethnic groups go into the making of her rich literary oeuvre. *The Black Hill* is based on recorded historical events of mid-nineteenth century Arunachal Pradesh, at a time when the East India Company was making inroads in the north-eastern regions of India, and the hostility and strong resistance meted out to them by the native tribes to keep the *migluns* (British) out of their territories. All the tribes were at one in their decision not to permit the white men to enter the hills. "The British may conquer the world but they will never take our land" (*Black Hill* 25), was the confidence of the clans as they crowded around the fireplace to think of strategies to keep the raiding British at bay.

It was the quest of a faith that was unshakeable, that took the French Jesuit priest Father Nicolas Michel Krick to live another life "over there" (*Black Hill* 39). His mind rebelled against the meaningless rituals of the church. He realised that his desperate yearning for union with the divine would come only through the path of love and service. So at the age of 29, in October 1848, Krick undertook the journey to the utmost ends of the earth, crossing seas and continents. He was selected on a mission to Tibet, taking a southern route across the Himalayas through India. On 23 December 1849, Father Krick boarded an English vessel heading for Madras. After a 100 day long voyage, they set foot on the Indian soil. But as they reached Madras, the name of their mission was changed from Tibet

to Assam. The team reached Gowhatee, and with stern instructions not to venture out beyond the Assam plain into the land of "savage mountaineers" (42). Father Krick enjoyed the serenity of the place surrounded by a chain of low hills, along which river Brahmaputra flowed. Krick started his exploratory journey across Assam towns and Abor tribal areas at the foot of the Himalayas, ignoring the tropical heat to which it was difficult to get acclimatized. With majority of population talking Assamese or Bengali, language posed a major problem for communication with the natives. Father Krick was determined to undertake an exploratory journey, going through Assam towns and reaching the foot of the Himalayas which would take him to Tibet. He had come so far in pursuit of a dream. Playing on his flute, manoeuvring his way through the countryside with its luxuriant growth of grass and trees, Krick was determined to pursue that dream and reach the land of Lamas. His plan was to secretly meet the tribes living in the Assam frontier and find his way out, though he was doubtful, because fearing that the British would capture their territories, the tribes had placed guards all along the frontier. But Father Krick believed that armed as he was only with his cross and flute, and his French and not British identity, he would be able to make his way to Tibet.

Mamang Dai dexterously interweaves Gimur-Kajinsha love story into this historical narrative. The arrival of Father Krick at the Village of Mebo in Arunachal Pradesh as part of Southern Tibet Mission was strongly resented by the villagers, who were determined not to permit entry to the whitemen who wanted to establish a trading post in the hills of Mebo. The seventeen year old Gimur, of the village of Mebo, shared the strong resentment of the villagers. Gimur's hatred of the British stemmed from the fact that they travelled up and down the country trying to enter other people's land without any respect for anyone. It was while he was tracking the white men, Kajinsha, a native of a village in Mishmee Hills, reached Abor and had the chance encounter with Gimur. Gimur's life took an unanticipated turn as she got drawn towards Kajinsha, who belonged to a different clan and talked a different language. She knew that if they got married, she would have to go and live in his village. Abor and Mishmee were among the 26 major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Abor villages were secure enclaves where the rules of tradition were considered inviolable. Gimur could anticipate the reaction of her family members in marrying Kajinsha, whose village and family status were unknown in Mebo. She realised that the only option left for her was to flee the village, because their marriage involved either war or abduction. She herself had no clue as to how she dared to undertake this journey with Kajinsha into the unknown – quite unlikely for a tribal woman to make. Gimur and Kajinsha settled down to their new life together

in the Black Hill, by the Dau River – a land close to the border with the Zayul valley of Tibet. Mamang Dai's women characters range from those who are steeped in tradition, innocent, submissive and hardworking to those who are assertive and sophisticated, struggling to come to terms with modernity. But Gimur cannot be type set in any such category – she is at once rooted to her tradition, but assertive enough to flout the norms of her tribe and accompany Kajinsha into a world of uncertainties. Dai refuses to call Gimur a “new woman” – “they are women of the tribe who protect family and clan. They are women who can also break tradition and are ready to pay the price. Women have always been doing this at different times throughout history” (qtd. in Sarangi).

The novel which is based on a recorded historical event, necessitates that the author keeps true to history. Hence, while tracing Father Krick's journey, Mamang Dai mentions how when Krick travelled through the region there was no McMahon line. He travelled back and forth from Assam through Mishmi territory twice before he reached Tibet (qtd. in Sarangi). In his journey to Tibet, Father Krick reached Mishmee Hills on 18th December 1851. But as they were about to reach the destination, he was informed that the route to Tibet was closed and they would have to go back. But nothing could deter Krick from his mission to spread the good news of the holy gospel, not even the fear of death. He wished that he could learn the language of the people there, so that he could speak to them from his heart; he could convince them of the words of the saviour.

Dai's fictional intervention into the narrative begins with Father Krick's arrival at Mishmee, where the first meeting between Kajinsha and the priest took place. Dai states:

I was also interested in the nature of spirituality. I felt if the priest and the tribal chief could have interacted for a bit more time, if things had been a little bit different, because he was beginning to see also that ultimately it was not about conversion or preaching, it was just speaking the language of the hearts. And the life they believed in, what they believed and that gives them the reason for being honoured, that gives their life's meaning. So that kind of thing I was trying to propose. (qtd. in Prodhani and Kuhad)

“It was the start of something” (*Black Hill* 138) – that is how Dai introduces the warm and strange friendship between the two men. Language stood no barrier in their relationship. They communicated in a mixture of Assamese and Tibetan words. Tapping at his food baskets and woollen coat, Kajinsha informed the priest that he had gone to Sommeu village for trade. In his turn, holding up his cross,

the priest conveyed his mission to Kajinsha. Dai writes, “And with every word and sentence exchanged, they understood each other better” (139). What drew Gimur to the priest was the beautiful music he played on his flute – “a clear, pure melody floating through the air, like someone urging the hills and trees to listen, and praying, waiting to hear if someone would answer” (133). As the priest poured over his notes, there was Gimur silently watching him from her hilltop perch. The priest could sense her presence behind him. Dai works out a strange mystical relationship between Gimur and the priest. Once as he stepped into Kajinsha's house, he saw a glimpse of Gimur's face, and for no unaccountable reason he felt an overwhelming sense of joy and gratitude – “Peace be in this house. God bless them. God bless this house!” (145), Father Krick found himself praying. A strange sense of sympathy welled up in his mind towards the woman of this house. “He did not know why, except that he felt she needed watching over. Did he want to convert her? Did he sense something about this woman's heart knocking against her breast that found an echo in his own?” (145), he was baffled at this strange feel he felt towards the girl.

History and fiction get inextricably interwoven as Gimur decided to go back to Mebo after following a terrible fight with Kajinsha. Being a self-respecting woman, Gimur could not accept her husband's relationship with another woman of Sommeu village, even though he was trapped into it in an inebriated condition. As she was trekking her way through the hills on her way back to Mebo, she saw the sight of Krick and two Mishmee men passing by. She felt the priest was following her like a ghost (*Black Hill* 156). Back at Mebo, she got settled to her life, braving the loss of her baby who breathed his last while crossing an overflowing stream, and also the separation from her husband. But past caught up with her, much earlier than she had anticipated. She heard the news of a Whiteman reaching Mebo asking the way to reach Tibet. The description – “he carries a tapung (flute), and he was a padre” (172) – was evidence strong enough for Gimur to realise that it was none other than Father Krick. Father Krick's arrival at Mebo was an incarnation from the past, as far as Gimur was concerned. The priest's entry into Mebo was the culmination of a plan he had secretly harboured, to find another route to Tibet by avoiding passing through Mishmee territory. He was not ready to give up the Tibet Mission that easily, even though the expedition had tested him to the limit. He knew that the kind of overwhelming reception he got from the Abor tribe was because he was a priest, a man of God, not a soldier carrying a gun. Ever since the British occupation of Assam, the natives viewed every man with white skin and protruding nose with suspicion, because they knew they brought war and captivity. He was happy to be with the

Abors – a tribe with a distinct tattooed cross – a vivid memory of a woman with a tattoo on her chin flashed before his eyes and he was on the lookout for someone who resembled that “unforgettable apparition” (177). Father Krick realised that he need to win the faith of the natives by convincing them that he was indeed a man of God, and for that he had to heal the sick. With his simple remedies, bare minimum of liniments, and poultice, Father Krick found himself transforming into a foreigner shaman, the man who created belief that his touch would cure them (179). He realised that it was a strange alchemy; they were healed through faith in him. “May God grant that by these bodily ministrations I can reach their souls” (187) – that was his fervent prayer and hope.

Dai states how the novel “is based on historical events, but the greater part of the book is imagined journeys, both interior and exterior, and about what happens when total strangers meet, in this case the two individuals, who might have found common ground – if only the time and circumstance had been a little different” (qtd. in Mallick). Dai works out quite an unlikely relationship between Gimur and the priest who are brought closer by the bonds of sorrow and love. At Mebo, once again Gimur was drawn to Father Krick by the music of his flute breaking over the treetops – the same music that had touched her soul a long time ago in the Mishmee hills. She realised the music touching the chord of her mind, and something had been returned to her with the music of the flute. It was her search for love that made her follow Kajinsha, breaking all taboos. But she didn't feel that she had committed any sin, since to love is no sin – “We are all created, all the offspring of Donyi Polo, from the bat and the worm struggling to mate and breed, to man and woman, for this one purpose – to love. I am unfortunate, but I did nothing wrong” (*Black Hill* 180). Gimur found that the arrival of the priest had changed the landscape. The sorrow in his eyes baffled her – “What had saddened him? A broken love? A child buried by the river? His sorrow could not be greater than hers. But there it was, in his eyes, like the shadow of a ghost. . . . What kind of love did he carry in his heart? (181). On his part, the priest too was intrigued by the girl – her aloof manner and posture. He knew that Abor women possessed great spirit and vigour – “She was the female warrior who had crossed rivers and mountains carrying a bright banner of love with the man called Kajinsha (182). He wanted to offer his friendship to her, but her thoughts were always hidden from him. As they sat in silence on the black hill hardly talking to each other, he felt he could hear her thoughts. He longed to lay his hand on her head and console her disturbed mind. Father Krick knew that the one thought which nagged her was the very same question that evaded him without a reply – “You tell me about love. The love of a God whose name we have

never heard. Where does he live?” (183), he could hear her say. As she held his gaze with unflinching ferocity, he could not tell her what he could easily have told the initiated – “There is a God who dwells in heaven” (183), without explaining where heaven was, whose physical features he could not describe. Not even the promise of a life after death could console her, tormented as she was by all the setbacks of her life.

History is a reality which defies its submergence in a world of fiction. As Dai is overwhelmed by the mesmerising beauty of fiction, she is shocked out of it by the intrusion of history. History demands that Gimur- Father Krick relationship has to be brought to its natural conclusion. Father Krick's stay at Mebo was cut short abruptly when he was asked to leave the village, because of a rumour that he was a spy of the Whitemen. Dai records:

Krick left Mebo on Holy Saturday of March 1853. He visited his patients and treated them one last time before he stepped out Another chapter had closed. On Easter Sunday, a violent storm broke over the hills as if to tear open the earth and bury all traces of Krick's presence in Mebo the records are silent about the journey of the priest during the intervening period from the time he left Mebo till autumn of the same year. (*Black Hill* 190)

But even after the priest had left, Gimur realised she could not shake herself free off the memories of the priest: “She had no image of the land he came from. It was a blank space. But here, in their midst she had seen him as another *ami* – man. . . may be his eyes and nose, skin and clothes and the words he spoke were different; but she had found what was invisible; his heart, thoughts and needs were just like theirs” (194). A new respect for everything; a new respect, a new humility equal to an “all-encompassing love and forgiveness for all that had happened” (194) overwhelmed her. It was a mysterious state of being where all rage and sorrow had fallen away leaving only the passion. And it was with this new feeling that surged up within her, that she went back to Kajinsha and they silently grieved the death of their child.

Dai keeps true to history as she introduces another character in her story – the French priest Father Augustin Bourry, who was sent to assist Krick who fell ill for 6 months after he left Mebo, suffering from a mysterious illness. Krick had survived just by his great will power and his unwavering passion to reach Tibet, that forbidden land: “I want to be there, to love and serve,” (*Black Hill* 207) he was determined. Realising that his effort to reach Tibet through Abor territory would be vain, he decided to push towards the Mishmee hills. In July 1854, the two priests

reached Sommeu village of Tibet, happy “at coming to the people who were to become his first flock, especially when they were still pagan” (221). Dai mentions how this was the last communication from Kirck and Bourry about their journey and arrival in Tibet. After this there was absolute silence. In their last letters, they sent a long list of items to be delivered from Paris to be wrapped in newspapers so that they could find out what was happening in Europe. But Father Krick’s strenuous life and arduous journey in the wilderness was taking a toll on his health. He felt so drained that all his work, the effort, the desire for a Christian Tibet was leaving him. He would die in the attempt to establish a Tibet mission, he felt. He wondered whether his dream of reaching Lassa and building a church in Tibet would ever be fulfilled. Krick then felt a strange desire to meet Kajinsha.

Where history stops, Dai’s fiction begins. History is silent about the mysterious deaths of the two priests, except that they were killed by the Mishmee chief. But from that silence, Dai creates a narrative – a story at once of deception and loyalty. Hell was let loose in Sommeu village when it was known that the chief Zumsha’s *chal-mithun* was killed, which was attributed to the white strangers. Kajinsha realised that the villagers were trying every possible way to get rid of the two priests. Gimur had an instinctive feeling that it was not safe for the priest to stay there. And his staying there would harm Kajinsha. But before she could warn the priest, he was struck down by chief Lamet’s sharp sword. Kajinsha’s attempt to save the priest by shooting down Lamet with his gun, also failed. The most touching part of the whole novel is a figment of Dai’s imagination, unrecorded anywhere in historical documents. As Gimur approached the bleeding body of the priest, he opened his eyes and stared at her. He clasped her hand and closing his eyes murmured what sounded to Gimur as “aenjal” (*Black Hill* 246), a word which she could not understand. He was so happy that she had arrived. As she stroked his hair, muttering something, he could feel the tenderness of her words, though not its meaning. He was overwhelmed by a mysterious feeling at the touch of her hands stroking his hair – “Ah! Mother, sister, friend! Lost in the forests of Lorraine . . . they were all returning to him now” (247). It was a moment they would understand each other through any language. He felt that he had to speak to this woman, but his breath was escaping fast. Dai mentions how summoning up his last ounce of strength, Krick put his hand on her head: “One day, he wanted to say, a greater light will shine on us. Do not be afraid. His eyes turns skywards and he could not pull his gaze away” (247). Gimur, who remained a silent witness to the final moments of the priest, closed his eyes with her hands. The priest had stopped breathing. “For no unaccountable reason she felt that the

death of the priest was a great blow to her. Her heart was turning into a dark cave. Somewhere in the emptiness of that lonely countryside she had seen a small, glimmering flame. She was moving towards it, when suddenly, as if by a blow of an angry God, it had been extinguished” (248). Kajinsha and Gimur carried the priest’s body up a hillside and left the body covered with tall grass, where no one could detect it. While history records that the body was buried by the local people, Gimur alone is privy to that story – “The history books would record the murder and death of the priest but their story would fall away into an unknown place buried beneath rocks and stones. No one will find him. Only I and Kajinsha will know that we left a man lying there with his eyes closed” (254). As the murder of Father Bourri was also reported, a history was in its making – of the Mishmee chief Kaisha (Mamang Dai’s ‘Kajinsha’) who killed the two priests.

The historical documents refer to how the punitive expedition under the command of Lieutenant F.G.Eden reached Kajinsha’s hideout deep in the Mishmee hills. The British authorities in Assam could not ignore the reports of the murder of the two French priests. Kajinsha also expected that someday the clansmen of the priest would definitely come in search of him. Six years went by, and they heard that the whitemen were planning to send soldiers into the Mishmee hills to catch the murderer of the two priests. What Kajinsha feared turned out to be true, as one night a battalion of soldiers crept up the dark hill to hunt him down. Kajinsha pushed Gimur down a ridge, where she would be safe, before he went on to encounter the soldiers. In the combat that followed, Kajinsha was overpowered and was taken to Debrooghur Jail in Assam. It was reported that many of Kajinsha’s relatives and sons were killed in the combat. Gimur who was lying unconscious in the ridge, came to know of Kajinsha’s imprisonment only late. With her knife tied around her waist, tying her wrap tight around her waist, Gimur set out off the black hills in search of Kajinsha.

Dai’s research made clear that no one had gone to Debrooghur jail to meet Kajinsha or to claim his body. But Dai feels she should make amends for it. Besides, there are some historical evidences for her to fall back on, to keep her fiction not a far cry from reality, but grounded on facts. In Dai’s own words:

At that time, it was impossible but still, I made Gimur to go and do a few things in the prison because there is a record in the British Archives in the history books that two guards were killed and the French foreign Missions had pleaded for mercy, for the killer, but they had hung him (Kajinsha) because of the death of the prison guard. So, one of the prison guards I made Gimur

kill and that was how this story went. (qtd. in Prodhani and Kuhad)

Debrooghur, where Kajinsha was sentenced to death, was an impregnable place and it would prove difficult to rescue him. It is recorded that there was a mercy plea for Kajinsha from Directors of Paris Foreign Mission that the death sentence of the killer be commuted to life imprisonment. However, things got complicated with the news that Kajinsha had killed a prison guard, which sealed his fate. Anyway, no one could deter Gimur from her decision to meet Kajinsha. As she stood before Kajinsha, she was reminded of the priest and the music of his flute – it was his death that had brought this curse on them. She was reminded of his death and how he looked at her with a tenderness that had pierced her soul. Standing before Kajinsha, overwhelmed by feeling of tenderness and love, Gimur realised she could at that moment understand what the priest had been trying to tell her before his death – “It was a story of love, all life was only about this feeling that was now welling up in her heart until she thought it would break into pieces and she would be left with nothing except but this wondrous glow that suffused her whole being” (*Black Hill* 280). She was brought back to reality by the vicious grip of a prison guard who was trying to pull her away from Kajinsha. With a rare strength which seemed to possess her whole being, reinforced by her love for Kajinsha, she plunged her knife into the throat of the prison guard who was trying to drag her away from her husband. Kajinsha pleaded her to escape – “Go, go! Live for me! Live” (282). And Gimur found herself uttering sounds like unintelligible prayers. The priest used to say: “You uttered words in your head and God heard them. You will never be alone like this” (282). As Kajinsha was led to the gallows, he felt he could hear the sound of Gimur’s thought and also the gentle voice of the priest and the music of his flute. Everything was getting mixed up. “Sinner, shaman, priest, lama, legend, all mingled together with the secret that no one would ever know, that all he had ever wanted was the desire to feel love” (286).

Mamang Dai puts across her mission in writing the novel through the words of Kajinsha who told Gimur when she had gone to visit him in the jail - “Tell them about us, Kajinsha had said to Gimur that night in the jail. Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So we tell stories” (*Black Hill* 288). Dai becomes the raconteur for Kajinsha, Gimur and the priest, and narrates all the stories left untold in the pages of history. Because, as Dai puts it in the ‘Author’s Note’ – The past is gone. It is only people like me, who look back. And may be some stray ghost of love who thinks the past is alive. And it is speaking to me, telling me, ‘Dig deep. Search. Don’t give up. It may be my brother’s story, a

sister’s, a friend’s, or my own (292). But even then, Dai is aware that some stories will always elude the historian. Perhaps some things, Dai feels, are better left unexplained (293). However, Dai with her strong conviction that lives get ended, but never a story, goes on to trace the unrecorded story, thus writing a new history.

There were references to so many people in the official records, but no one knew Gimur and her name not mentioned anywhere in the records. But Dai creates a fictional character and a platonic relationship between the priest and the tribal girl, to give a new dimension to a historical text. Where the story encoded in history ends, or gets enshrouded in enigmatic silence, Dai makes Gimur articulate those silences and proclaim the innocence of Kajinsha. The novel *The Black Hill* is construed as a narrative in which history, myths and memories merge. But in creating a fictional character and centralising her, Dai’s mission is made explicit. By making an alleged murderer into a saviour figure, Dai was actually subverting history. As Dai puts it:

History actually is a meeting place, there are so many possibilities that we don’t really know what happened. Even in *The Black Hill* the character of Gimur, right at the end I had put, ‘they didn’t know what the history books would say about them,’ maybe so and so died in the village war and she herself disappeared from history. So that was my way of being authentic, because Gimur is just a fictional character, the priest is true, the tribal chief is true but Gimur was just there as a narrator but I thought I should put in some truth and say she no longer exists. So that was my way of being a little bit true to possibilities. (qtd. in Prodhani and Kuhad)

The Black Hill was not Dai’s attempts to recreate tribal history and culture; nor was she centre-staging the resistance of the tribes to the intruding whitemen. All these historical facts are kept intact in the novel. But historical verisimilitude was the least of Dai’s concern in this novel. In his essay “New Historicism and Cultural Materialism,” Pramod K. Nayar observes that, “We cannot separate literature as an effect of historical or social contexts but have to see literature as contributing to, informing, influencing and participating actively in the construction of these contexts” (203). In that sense, Mamang Dai’s *The Black Hill* is constructing a historical and social context, which will never ever be recorded in the official historical texts of either the *miglun* (whitemen) or that of the tribes, since it is the ‘story’ of an unnatural relationship of the soul between a whiteman and two tribal people. Mamang Dai writes in the Prologue to the novel – “The reader can decide

whether this story be true or not. The reader can decide whether to believe, or not, what I believe: that after everything is laid to rest all that matters is love; and that memory gives life, and life never ends" (x). Dai explores the silences in history and works out an intriguing, mystical relationship between Gimur and the priest, and between Kajinsha and the priest, thus making the text a parable on love. The novel becomes a loud proclamation of the sanctity of human relationships; of the depth and infinity of human love which transcends all man-made barriers, and bears testimony to moments when hearts can communicate in silent unison.

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